

Ballast Water News, April 24, 2008

WASHINGTON DC (April 24) – The U.S. House of Representatives made a huge step in protecting our waters from aquatic invaders today by passing legislation that ensures no living species will be discharged from ballast water tanks of ocean-going vessels. The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 2830) passed by a vote of 395 to 7.

The legislation is Title V of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 2830) and requires installation of technology meeting current International Maritime Organization ballast discharge standards by as early as next year. Ships would then be required to begin installing treatment equipment in 2012 to meet a more rigorous standard that is one hundred times more stringent than the international standard.

“These standards and timeline are both aggressive and achievable, and this is exactly the type of strong legislation the environmental community has championed for years,” said Corry Westbrook, legislative director for the National Wildlife Federation.

Citing the lack of clarification on how the ballast water title applies to recreational vessels among its concerns, the Bush administration has threatened to veto the bill. The administration’s main objection however, was not in Title V, but particular to Coast Guard requirements to protect liquefied natural gas terminals and vessels.

“The House has already promised to address the White House’s concerns regarding recreational boaters separately,” said Phyllis Windle, senior scientist and director of invasive species for the Union of Concerned Scientists. “This strong demonstration of support in the House bodes well for withstanding the threat of a potential veto.”

The National Environmental Coalition of Invasive Species has said that its endorsing groups will continue to push for strong support in the Senate to further strengthen ballast water legislation.

“We hope this decisive action in the House sends the right signals to the Senate that this is a bill deserving quick action and passage before the elections consume our attention,” said Mike Daulton, director of conservation policy for the National Audubon Society.

Strong bipartisan support for the legislation followed the adoption of two essential amendments. The first, a manager’s amendment, improves transparency by requiring that regulated ships submit records of their actions to the Secretary of Transportation on a monthly basis, and ensures that ships claiming no ballast water on board are subject to treatment requirements when the bill comes into effect.

A second amendment by Mark Kirk (R-Illinois) gives the Coast Guard the authority to take emergency response measures if vessels operating exclusively within the Great Lakes present the risk of spreading invasive species or infectious diseases.

“The United States is moving to set global precedent in protecting the Great Lakes and waters nationwide from crippling biological pollution” said Jennifer Nalbone, campaign director of Great Lakes United. “Let’s keep up the momentum.”

H.R. 2830 also includes several key provisions championed by the National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species in recent months, including an enhanced role for the Environmental Protection Agency to review and improve discharge standards, the addition of a provision allowing for citizens to petition the government, and the closure of a loophole that could have resulted in long-term delays in implementing onboard treatment. Additionally, the bill allows states to retain their ability to complement and strengthen the federal program.

The National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species endorsing organizations include the National Wildlife Federation, Union of Concerned Scientists, Great Lakes United, National Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Areas Association, Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, and The Nature Conservancy.